Always Here by BlueClue182

Series: February Fluff Challenge [8]
Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)
Language: English
Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Jim "Chief" Hopper, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers
Relationships: Eleven & Hopper, Eleven/Mike Wheeler, Mike Wheeler & Nancy Wheeler, Will Byers & Eleven & Dustin Henderson & Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Lucas Sinclair & Mike Wheeler
Status: Completed
Published: 2018-02-08
Updated: 2018-02-08
Packaged: 2022-04-21 15:01:21
Rating: General Audiences
Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply
Chapters: 1
Words: 1,037
Publisher: archiveofourown.org
Summary:

The one where everyone compares notes on how to handle a nightmare.

Prompt: "I'll always be here."

Always Here

Author's Note:

> February Fluff Challenge late entry from the 8th. I didn't want to write another story about Mike and Eleven whispering at each other in a bed, so I sent them off to school. Unbeta'ed.

It didn't happen often anymore, but it *did* still happen. Eleven would fall asleep normally and start to dream normally, but then the edges would fade and everything would go dark. She lost her friends and her new family, and worst of all, they were replaced with faceless agents and demogorgons in lab coats. Images of Barb and everyone she loved in heaps on the ground, everyone bloated and slimy and GONE GONE GONE rang out in the air.

She didn't go back to sleep after that. She'd stay up reading or putting together a puzzle, or playing solitaire, or seeing how many things she could levitate at once before giving herself a nosebleed. She told Hopper about this after a few nights in a row without any sleep at all.

"Hey, kid—you're not going to believe this but that's kind of normal for what you've been through. If you want, we can talk to the Doc—"

"No." El was still wary of Doctors in general, especially any that had been connected with the upside down.

"Okay, okay." Hopper put down his fork. "Then maybe we should read up on it, together. It's called PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder. They were treating Will for it when he came back—maybe we should talk to him and Joyce?"

"Maybe."

Hopper looked up at the clock. "Alright, we can pick this up later. Time for school." They rode to Hawkins High talking about music and homework and maybe trying new vegetables. When they pulled up, the Party was waiting for her by the bike rack as always. Hopper

lifted Eleven's own bike out of the truck, waved at the rest of the kids, ruffled Eleven's hair, and was on his way.

There was a new music video on MTV the night before and everyone had an opinion on it. Eleven mentioned she hadn't seen it, and then stayed silent on the subject.

Dustin noticed it first but didn't say anything until the Party regrouped for lunch.

"You okay, El?"

"Huh? Oh. Yes." But she was dipping her spoon into her pudding without actually eating any of it.

"You look really tired, are you sleeping okay?" She shrugged and scooped up some pudding, then let it fall back into its plastic cup.

"Not really."

"Yeah, I've got this huge project that I'm presenting for Mr. Clarke's students and it's stressing me out so much I'm having NIGHTMARES." She cocked her head at the word, indicating she didn't recognize it. "Nightmares, they're bad dreams but worse than regular bad? Sometimes they wake you up and sometimes they just stick with you like all day long because they were just…messed up."

"Are nightmares normal?" Her question was answered with a chorus of *Yes, yeah, of course, DEFINITELY*. Mike returned from the lunch line and sat down next to her.

"Nightmares are more normal in this crowd than maybe anywhere else." He stated, matter-of-factly. "Are you having nightmares?" Eleven nodded, and Lucas jumped in.

"Not everyone has nightmares, but we've been through some scary shit together."

"Yeah. And almost everyone has nightmares about silly stuff when they're kids." Will added.

"What do you…do. When you have a nightmare?" She looked around

the table, where her friends were all exchanging glances, waiting for someone to speak up first.

“I unplug my guitar and practice it without the sound.” Max chimed in.

“My mom used to make me warm milk and let me watch TV with her until I fell asleep on the couch, so now I do that but without her.” Dustin added.

Will said he worked on drawings or took a warm shower. Lucas did push-ups or ran around the house a few times. Finally, Eleven turned to Mike.

“Mine is stupid.” He poked at his mushed-up vegetables.

“Not stupid.” El took his hand.

“We won’t laugh.” Will offered.

“Promise.” Lucas agreed, and Max held up her hand.

“Scout’s honor.” Dustin nodded along.

“Fine but I don’t want to talk about it again after right now.” He lowered his voice. “When I was really little I’d run to my mom and dad’s room, and then they started locking the door—right around the time Holly was born. I was sitting in the hallway making a bunch of noise and Nancy came out of her room, picked me up and asked what was the matter. I told her, and she asked if I wanted to come stay with her and tell her about my dreams, and she could explain why they were impossible. So the next time, I just knocked on her door and she let me in. Usually I’d fall asleep in her bed but then wake up in mine so she must have brought me back at some point.” He went back to eating his food.

“That’s really sweet, Wheeler.” Max was the first to speak.

“Never again.” He warned, pointing his fork at her. She held up her hands in surrender.

Eleven was quiet but kept holding Mike’s hand. “So you all get

nightmares?" Everyone nodded again in response. "Huh. Okay."

"Do you—need to talk about them more?" Lucas asked.

"Mine are about all of you." Eleven barely whispered it, but everyone heard. "They start out normal, but then it gets you. And you're all gone by the end. Like Barb." Mike stopped eating at that. "The worst is when I have to see all of you at once, in a pile. Papa is there, sometimes, but I can handle him. Seeing all of you like that, though? Thinking of being alone again?" She wiped away the one tear that dared fall from her eyes.

"Hey, hey! El. We're never going to let that happen." Mike took both her hands then.

"Yeah, we took them down twice. We could take 'em again." Lucas added.

"And I'll never leave you, remember? I promised I wouldn't lose you again. I'll always be here." Mike smiled at her, but it was not reciprocated.

"I'll never leave you either." Dustin smirked.

"Me either." Lucas and Max added at the same time.

"Yeah. You're stuck with us. Crazy together, right?" Even Will was smiling.

"Always here." Eleven liked the way that sounded.